

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR NURSING HOME RESIDENTS ABOUT RESTRAINTS

A restraint is anything that keeps a person from moving freely or touching part of her/his body, and that (s)he needs help to remove. Cloth ties, vests, chair trays, bed rails, hand mitts, and tucking a sheet around someone so that (s)he cannot move are restraints.

Restraints are dangerous. People who are restrained may become depressed or agitated, or develop bedsores because they cannot move. They are more likely to get hurt if they fall. They can break their bones or be strangled by the restraint. Illinois has strict laws about when a nursing home resident can be restrained.

1. Restraints can be used only if they are necessary to improve a resident's health, or keep the resident from getting sicker.
2. Restraints can be used only if they are ordered by a doctor.
3. Restraints are a last choice. Before using a restraint, staff must try less restrictive alternatives suggested by an expert such as a rehab nurse or occupational therapist.
4. Except in an emergency, a restraint can be used only with the written informed consent of a resident or someone authorized to make her/his health-care decisions. Informed consent means that the decision-maker is told the possible risks and benefits of using a restraint. The consent form must say what restraint is to be used, and for how long.
5. The restraint must not keep the resident from moving any more than is necessary.
6. A restraint can be used only for the shortest time necessary.
7. Every resident in a restraint must be freed, get any necessary care, helped to walk if (s)he can, and repositioned at least every two hours.
8. The staff must keep track of and write down how the resident reacts to the restraint. When the consent period expires, the restraint can be used only if the doctor orders it and the decision-maker signs a new informed consent form. The decision-maker must be told how the restraint has affected the resident, including any bad effects, before signing the form.
9. It is illegal to use a restraint to keep a resident from wandering, because there is not enough staff to watch residents, or as a punishment. A restraint with a lock is illegal.
10. A restraint cannot be used to force a competent resident to get medical care.

There are alternatives to restraints. Pillows can help a resident sit straight. A reclining chair or a chair alarm; sitting where the staff can watch; a bed alarm; floor padding around a bed with short legs or a bed lowered to the floor: these can keep a resident from falling.

For more information about restraints and alternatives to restraints, call the Illinois Department on Aging , **1-800-252-8966**, for the phone number of your local nursing home resident ombudsman.

Information courtesy of the Chicago Department on Aging: Joyce Gallagher, Commissioner; Richard M Daley, Mayor.

